

What is anger? How should we handle it? In a world of disappointments, imperfections, miseries, and sins (our own and others'), anger is a given. You get angry. I get angry. No wonder the Bible comes packed with stories, teachings, and comments about anger. God intends us to understand anger and to know how problems of anger can be resolved.

According to the Bible, even God gets angry—at sin and evil. The fact that he does tells us that anger can be utterly right, good, appropriate, beautiful, the only fair response to something evil, and the loving response on behalf of evil's victims. But Satan is angry as well. Anger like his is utterly wrong, bad, inappropriate, ugly—a completely destructive response. Such anger summons the very essence of evil: "I want my way and not God's, and because I can't have my way, I rage."

Anger is natural to human beings in two very different ways. It is natural because we were created in God's image with the capacity for godly anger. But sinful anger is also natural to us since the Fall. As human beings corrupted into the image of Satan, we are also

hard-wired for resentment and hatred. And in a fallen world, human anger is so disordered that even righteously aroused anger easily degenerates into something sinful.

This brings us back to our opening questions: What is anger and how should we handle it? Our world offers answers that are governed by many harmful misconceptions and outright lies. But the Bible's answers offer hope and power to people trapped in their struggles with anger. Its truth provides a pathway out of anger and the maze of lies and confusion that surrounds it.

If you feel helpless to overcome anger, be encouraged! God does not show us our sins to leave us trapped in them. Jesus came to defeat anger's power in your life, and his wisdom can guide you as you do battle against it. Let's begin by looking at three of the most common and harmful misconceptions about anger that plague our society and our personal lives.

Lie #1: Anger Is Something Inside Me

The Bible makes it clear that anger is not a "thing." It is a moral act of the whole person, not a "substance" or a "something" inside you. That might sound obvious, but most popular understandings of anger don't see it. Is anger a hot, emotional fluid that builds up pressure inside? Or is anger a demon that takes up resi-

gency? These common ideas—opposed to each other in every other way!—both agree that anger is a *something*.

In Western culture, many theories of anger treat it as an emotional fluid that builds up pressure inside and must be released. This “hydraulic” theory of anger contributes to the pop wisdom that anger “just is, and is neither good nor bad.” Why does this theory seem plausible? Because images such as the following capture what anger can feel like: A person’s anger can be “pent up”; “his pump is primed.” People can be “boiling mad,” “filled” with anger, waiting to “explode.” They “blow off steam.” Old, unresolved anger can be “stored up inside,” “harbored” for decades. If you “get it off your chest” so that your anger is “spent,” you feel better. All these metaphors depict anger as a pressurized substance inside us.

No doubt, these colorful descriptions *do* capture how anger feels. But a metaphor is not meant to overpower the thing it intends to illustrate. Anger feels fiery, but it’s not a fire. The solution to sinful anger is not to surgically remove the furnace or to drink enough water to quench the flames! The solution is a moral one: to “turn” from sin to God’s grace in repentant faith.

When people believe that anger is something inside them, not something they do, it

points them to a solution other than repentance. Counseling will seek to release pressure by “lancing the boil” (another metaphor!). “Here’s a pillow. Call it your mom. Take this baseball bat and wallop the pillow, cursing her out for everything she did. You’ll get the anger out of your system, and you’ll be fixed.”

The scenario sounds logical only if anger is a *thing* inside us. But because anger is a moral act of the whole person, the scenario is sinful, even if it does take the edge off the anger temporarily. The true solution is self-understanding, an acknowledgment of wrong, repentance, faith, and new obedience by the power of God’s grace.

In animistic cultures—and in some segments of contemporary Christian culture—many people treat anger as a “demon.” Again, anger is *something* inside you, and you will be fixed by getting it out of you, in this case by casting it out. Again, the theory seems plausible. Anger, as much as any sin, makes us exactly like the Devil. When you see (or are) a sinfully angry person, the Devil’s image is displayed.

But the Devil’s hand in anger is no different from his involvement in any other sin. He does not demonize us into sin; he rules us. He tempts and lies in order to control and destroy us. The solution lies not in exorcism from supposed demons of rage, anger, pride, and rebellion; it lies in *repentance* from rage, anger,